

Land Health Evaluation Report
LaMarche Creek Allotment
Bureau of Land Management
Butte Field Office

Introduction and Assessment Process

This report documents whether land health standards were achieved for the LaMarche Creek Grazing Allotment administered by the Bureau of Land Management's Butte Field Office. Standards for Rangeland Health were evaluated utilizing an interdisciplinary team (ID team) of resource specialists.

Rangeland Health Standards for Western Montana are described in detail in the Record of Decision (ROD) issued for Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota (August 1997). The preamble of the Western Montana Standards states: "The purpose of the S&Gs (Standards and Guidelines) are to facilitate the achievement and maintenance of healthy, properly functioning ecosystems within the historic and natural range of variability for long-term sustainable use." Standards are statements of physical and biological condition or degree of function required for healthy sustainable lands. Achieving or making significant progress towards these functions and conditions is required of all uses of public land as stated in 43 CFR 4180.1.

This report contains an evaluation of each of the five standards:

- Standard #1 Upland Health
- Standard #2 Riparian/Wetland Health
- Standard #3 Water Quality
- Standard #4 Air Quality
- Standard #5 Biodiversity

Available monitoring data from both upland and riparian sites, existing inventories, historical photographs and standardized methodology are used by an ID team to assess condition and function. Condition/function declarations regarding this allotment are expressed as:

- Proper Functioning Condition (PFC)
- Functioning at Risk (FAR), which is assigned a trend of up, down, static or not apparent
- Nonfunctioning (NF)

Standards are met when conditions are at PFC or FAR with an upward trend. This is dependent on scope and scale. The BLM will consider the information contained in this report, along with public scoping and other sources of information, to make a determination regarding causal factors and courses of action to be analyzed in a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document.

General Allotment Summary

Allotment Name/Number: LaMarche Creek #10508

Current Management Category: M (Maintain)

Location: T2N, R13W, Section 22; Deer Lodge County

Public Acres: 163.89 acres.

Season of Use: 06/15 to 10/15

Public Animal Unit Months: 17

Assessment Date: July 1, 2009

The LaMarche Creek Allotment is located about 18 miles northwest of Wise River, MT and 20 miles northeast of Wisdom, MT. The allotment is grazed in conjunction with adjacent private property (approximately 1300 acres), owned by the permittee. The permittee's private property is leased to their neighbor, for livestock grazing. The use on this public land allotment is authorized through a Livestock Management Agreement (LMA).

In 1992 the present land owners bought this ranch and acquired the LaMarche Creek Allotment. Livestock grazing intensity has been reduced with this change in ownership.

Livestock are grazed in this area from 6/15 to 9/15 each year for 2 weeks out of each month, in a 2 week on and then 2 week off grazing rotation. This grazing system was established by the permittees and has been endorsed by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MDFW&Ps). Under the Arctic Grayling Recovery Program, the permittees in cooperation with the MDFW&Ps have fenced off a portion of LaMarche Creek on private property and drilled water wells and constructed 3 stock tanks in order to draw livestock away from the creek.

The major soil map units are:

54E – Libeg gravelly loam, 15 to 35 percent slopes. Mean annual precipitation: 15 to 23 inches. Frost-free period: 30 to 70 days.

682E – Elve bouldery sandy loam. 4 to 25 percent slopes. Mean annual precipitation: 20 to 30 inches. Frost-free period: 30 to 70 days.

The Wise River weather station reports 11.22 inches of precipitation on average. No temperature information is available for this weather station. The Wisdom weather station reports 11.89 inches of precipitation on average, and an average daily temperature of 35.7 degrees Fahrenheit. These are the closest weather stations to this allotment.

Summary of Standards Achieved

--Yes, No, N/A (Not Applicable)--

Allotment Name	Allot #	1. Upland	2. Riparian	3. Water Quality	4. Air Quality	5. Biodiversity
LaMarche Creek	10508	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Rangeland Health Standards Evaluation and Rationale

The issue of scope and scale must be kept in mind when evaluating each standard. It is recognized that isolated sites within a landscape may be Functioning at Risk (FAR) and not meeting the standards; however, considering broader scope and scale, the area may be deemed in Proper Functioning Condition (PFC). Likewise, isolated sites may be in PFC, but, overall, the resource within the allotment or area could be FAR and not meeting standards. Therefore, no single indicator provides sufficient information to determine rangeland health. Indicators are used in combination to provide information necessary to make rangeland health determinations.

Western Montana Standard #1

“Uplands are in Proper Functioning Condition”

Finding Standard is met.

Rationale

The rangeland health evaluation conducted on this allotment was compared to the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s ecological site guides. The site evaluated on this allotment showed little departure from the soil stability, hydrologic and biotic function indicators.

Utilization is within acceptable levels on this allotment and on adjacent private property managed with the public land.

Site 1: a Rangeland Health Evaluation Worksheet was completed on T2N, R13W, Sec. 22: SE1/4SW1/4. The soil type for this site is Libeg gravelly loam, 15 to 35 percent slopes (54E). This site was determined to be a silty 15-19” precipitation zone ecological site. The assessment showed 17 of 17 indicators rated none to slight from departure.

The uplands are in Proper Functioning Condition.

Western Montana Standard #2

“Riparian and Wetland Areas are in Proper Functioning Condition”

Finding Standard is met.

Rationale

The riparian reach, DL-9 was rated as Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) in 1988, 2002 and again in 2009. This reach is approximately 2500 feet in length and flows through a

stand of lodgepole pine. The Interdisciplinary Team (ID) gave this reach all positive responses for the hydrological, vegetation and erosion deposition functions. There were no concerns about its function.

Western Montana Standard #3:
“Water Quality Meets State Standards.”

Finding Standard is not met.

Rationale

The State of Montana, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has responsibility for implementing the Clean Water Act. This responsibility includes making beneficial use determinations.

The State of Montana 303(d) list of impaired water bodies was reviewed for Deer Lodge County and LaMarche Creek is included on this list. Based on the data provided by the State of Montana LaMarche Creek supports the agriculture, aquatic life, cold water fishery, drinking water, industrial and recreation beneficial uses. No probable causes or sources were given on the report for listing this stream.

Based on the above evaluation and DEQ determinations, the water quality standard is not met on this allotment.

Western Montana Standard #4
“Air Quality Meets State Air Quality Standards.”

Finding Standard is met.

Rationale

Although the actual air quality in the allotment is unknown, there is no evidence to suggest that the current allotment conditions would be contributing to any air quality problems in terms of a source of smoke or dust particulates. No visual impairment was observed.

Western Montana Standard #5
“Provide habitat as necessary, to maintain a viable and diverse population of native plant and animal species, including special status species.”

Finding Standard is met.

Rationale

The following indicators were used to assess whether existing habitat conditions are at a

condition to support viable and diverse populations of native plant and animal species, including special status species.

- Plants and animals are diverse, vigorous, and reproducing satisfactorily.
- Noxious weeds are absent or insignificant in the overall plant community.
- Spatial distribution of species is suitable to ensure reproductive capability and recovery.
- A variety of age classes is present.
- Connectivity of habitat or presence of corridors prevents habitat fragmentation.

- Diversity of species (including plants, animals, insects, and microbes) are represented.
- Plant communities in a variety of successional stages are represented across the landscape.

The allotment provides habitat necessary to maintain a diverse population of native plant and animal species including special status species. Vegetation and observed wildlife and their habitat were all in a healthy condition on the allotment. Noxious weeds are rare or absent. The vegetative composition and reproductive capability are healthy throughout the allotment. A variety of successional stages and age classes of plant communities are represented across the landscape.

Although the LaMarche Creek Allotment is small (roughly 160 acres), it borders a large tract of Forest Service lands to the north. The allotment, in conjunction with the larger habitat found on the Forest, provides habitat for wide variety of species including but not limited to: elk, moose, mule deer, coyote, red fox, badger, bobcat, cougar, black bear, mountain lion, pine marten, river otter, beaver, snowshoe hare, mountain cottontail, marmot, ground squirrels, flying squirrel, red squirrel, long-tailed weasel, and other small mammals.

The allotment and adjacent lands provide habitat for a diversity of forest and grassland bird species including but not limited to: pileated, hairy, downy and three-toed woodpeckers, Cooper's hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, red-tailed hawk, great-horned owl, blue grouse, dusky flycatcher, pine siskin, western tanager, black-capped chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch, Townsend's solitaire, dark-eyed junco, Cassin's finch, pine siskin, red crossbill, western meadowlark, red-tailed hawk, horned lark, mountain bluebird, and chipping sparrow.

The allotment is within core habitat. Core habitats are areas large enough for wildlife (especially animals with large home ranges including carnivores) to forage and reproduce as well as allow animals to move through the region. The area provides a critical link for animals moving from north to south and also provides for local daily movements and seasonal movements between higher elevation summer range and lower elevation winter range.

LaMarche Creek flows through this allotment and provides excellent habitat for brook,

brown and rainbow trout. Although this reach of LaMarche Creek is upstream of occupied arctic grayling habitat, water quality and stream conditions within the allotment could affect arctic grayling downstream. The stream is currently in excellent condition with complex habitat and forested streamside vegetation.

Preliminary Identification of Causal Factors and Recommendations

Based on the field review and observations, it appears the following factors may be contributing to land health standards not being achieved:

- No causal factors are identified for Water Quality not meeting standard. Current grazing management does not appear to contribute to this condition. No excess sediment is produced from water running off this allotment.

Final determinations will be made upon assessment of further information. It should be noted that if changing a current management or use will not result in progress toward meeting the standards, then the current management or use should not be considered a significant causal factor.

The following actions may be necessary in order to make significant progress in achieving the Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health:

- No actions are identified. Any actions that could affect present water quality of LaMarche Creek are out of BLM control.

How This Information Will Be Used

If the information in this Evaluation Report indicates that the allotment meets the Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health, BLM will issue grazing decision(s) (subject to protest and appeal) to renew or issue associated grazing authorizations as necessary, with the appropriate level of NEPA documentation and public involvement in accordance with CEQ guidance and BLM direction. No additional final determinations are necessary.

For allotments not meeting the Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health, BLM will use the information in this Evaluation Report along with any other relevant data or information, including input from interested parties, to make a final determination whether or not current grazing management or levels of use are a significant causal factor in not meeting rangeland health standards on the allotment. If current grazing management and/or levels of use appear to be a significant causal factor, BLM will use the NEPA process to document the affected environment and develop alternatives to propose changes to grazing management to facilitate achieving rangeland health standards. These changes or actions will be addressed with an appropriate level of NEPA documentation and public involvement in accordance with CEQ guidance and BLM direction. A Final Determination Document will be prepared in concert with the NEPA analysis and associated decision(s). Pursuant to 43 CFR 4180.2(c), the Authorized Officer shall take appropriate action as soon as practicable, but not later than the start of

the next grazing year upon determining that existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on public lands are significant factors in failing to achieve the standards. Any grazing decisions, however, are subject to protest and appeal.

If current grazing management or levels of use do not appear to be a significant causal factor, changes or activities in other program areas or activities that appear to be significant causal factors may or may not be undertaken through a NEPA process, dependent on program and office priorities. However, a Final Determination Document will be prepared to document and outline the significant causal factors.

Involvement of Permittees, State Agencies and Interested Publics

The following parties were solicited by mail to see if they had interest in the 2009 Rangeland Health Assessments for the BLM – Butte Field Office: MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Western Watersheds Project, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Helena National Forest, Gallatin National Forest, MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and the allotment grazing lessee.

The grazing permittee's representative accompanied the Interdisciplinary Team on the 2009 assessment and participated in it.

BLM Staff Participants

The following BLM staff participated in the preparation of this report:

Assessment Team Member	Title	Signature	Date
John Sandford	Natural Resource Specialist		
Sarah LaMarr	Wildlife Biologist		
Tanya Thrift	Riparian Coordinator		
Corey Meier	Soil, Water, Air Lead (Soils Scientist)		

Review	Title	Signature	Date
Renee Johnson	Assistant Field Manager, Renewable Resources		
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